

Putin Says Russia Could Survive Suspension of Ukrainian Defense Imports

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President Vladimir Putin said Monday that Russia can cope with the potential loss of defense imports from Ukraine, adding that it would take up to 2 1/2 years to fill the gap with domestic products.

Deputy Ukrainian Prime Minister Vitaly Yarema said earlier this month that his country was planning to end military cooperation with Russia and seek other buyers for its products, according to Interfax-Ukraine.

However, Putin said Monday at a meeting of legislators in Petrozavodsk that a suspension of military industrial relations with Russia would be catastrophic for Ukraine as it does not currently have other markets to fall back on, Interfax reported.

The Ukrainian defense industry currently sends about 30 percent of its exports to Russia,

Radio Liberty reported last month.

Putin also said that anticipated Western sanctions that target Russia's defense industry were likely aimed at complicating Russia's efforts to compensate for a suspension in Ukrainian defense imports, Interfax reported.

He added that Russia's budget could shoulder the burden and that the government's defense orders would not need to be revised should the relationship with Ukraine deteriorate further.

The Soviet Union's purposeful spreading out of defense industry factories has made Russia dependent on factories in central and eastern Ukraine, particularly for key missile components, missile guidance systems and the experts needed to check them.

Putin on Monday invited highly qualified Ukrainian defense industry specialists to work in Russia, adding that the relocation process had already started and that the specialists "will receive all the necessary funds from the federal budget."

Weakened defense industry ties between the two countries could also make the federalization of Ukraine attractive to Russia because regions where factories are located might be able to negotiate deals with the Russian government separately.

However, Kimberley Marten, a professor of political science at Barnard College, Columbia University, told The Moscow Times by email that Russia's industrial interests in Ukraine will eventually necessitate the establishment of a working relationship between Moscow and Kiev.

"Putin's industrial cronies have strong interests in Ukraine, and strong interests in finding a modus vivendi with Kiev," she said.

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